

Senator John Whitmire
Senate District 15

July 1, 2015

The Honorable Ron Hickman
Sheriff
Harris County
1200 Baker Street
Houston, Texas 77002

Re: Movement of Harris County inmates to privately operated jail in Jefferson County

Dear Sheriff Hickman:

I am adamantly opposed to your decision to transfer Harris County residents confined in Harris County jails to a private, for-profit jail in Jefferson County. I find it hard to believe that with roughly 600 empty beds in the Baker Street minimum security facility it is necessary to spend taxpayer dollars to house 100 Harris County jail inmates in Beaumont.

Moving these inmates places an unnecessary hardship on them and their families who wish to visit their loved ones and maintain their family contact. Family visitation is proven to be a vital component of rehabilitation and breaking the cycle of crime.

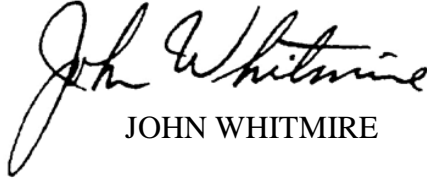
I am advised that the decision to move these individuals was a unilateral one, made without consultation with the Harris County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee. Since the jail was still within its approved operating capacity, collaboration with the major stakeholders of the Harris County criminal justice system may have led to alternative resolutions without the transfer of inmates.

As an example, Harris County is well-known for its abysmal use of pre-trial or personal bonds even though Harris County Commissioner's Court expends millions of dollars to support the Harris County Pre-Trial Service Department, which is now headed by a director recruited through a nationwide search. Surely within the thousands of inmates currently held, there must be 100 or more who would have qualified for these services and saved the taxpayers from enriching a private, for-profit jail.

It has been reported the inmates transferred are individuals sentenced to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. I stand ready to work with you and any other Harris County official on issues overseen by a state agency.

I look forward to working with you and other Harris County officials to find alternative resolutions to the issue of overcrowding in Harris County jails.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Whitmire". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

JOHN WHITMIRE

JW:lc